

**Testimony Submitted by Emmanuella Lauture to the Housing Committee
SB 291: “An Act Concerning Certain Protections for Group and Family Child Care
Homes”**

Connecticut General Assembly

March 10, 2022

Good morning Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, ranking members, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Emmanuella Lauture. I worked as a family child care educator for 6 years. I was licensed by the state of Connecticut through the Office of Early Childhood to care for young children in my home. The safe, nurturing, loving early care and education I provided as a family child care educator and continue to provide as a center director is a critical support for children and families. I am writing in support of SB 291: “An Act Concerning Certain Protections For Group and Family Child Care Homes”.

From day one, I have strived to pursue training and education opportunities to make sure I am providing the highest quality care for the children in my program. My program is aligned with the CT Early Learning and Development standards, and I have been credentialed for my work in early childhood, receiving the Child Development Associate (CDA)--a widely recognized credential in my field. Because I am passionate about what I do, I am eager to expand my child care program, giving more children and families in my community access to high-quality care. But, I have faced many barriers trying to doing this. My experience demonstrates why we need SB 291.

On January 7, 2016 I submitted my first application to request a special exception from the Stamford Zoning Board of Appeals in order to expand the number of children that I was permitted to care for in my home from 6 children (family child care home) to no more than 12 children (group child care home), in accordance with state licensing regulations. Unfortunately, my request was denied at a hearing held in March 2016 because my home only had 3 parking spaces, instead of the 4 parking spaces required to care for 12 children. I was told that I could reapply for a special exception to care for up to 10 children, which would only require 3 parking spots.

I thought that was an easy fix but wanted to increase my chance of success for the next time, so I hired an attorney from a firm recommended to me by another child care educator who had a similar case and whose request was approved. In September 2016, after waiting the required six months since my first hearing, I eagerly submitted another application requesting a special

exception to care for up to 10 children, to meet the parking requirement. Again, my application was denied--this time, due to opposition from a couple neighbors who feared an increase in traffic, despite the fact that parents are rarely at my program at the same time, and many of the children in my program are siblings. A member of the Zoning Board, seeing how determined I was, suggested that I try again with a new location.

In March of 2017, my sister decided to purchase a home. I offered to purchase the home jointly with her, with the idea that she would live in the home and I would convert the garage into a space for my child care program. Before purchasing the home, I consulted with a surveyor to make sure that the property met the parking space requirement for a group child care home. After the closing date, I quickly began the process to file for a group child care permit, but I hit another roadblock. I could not move forward because the garage that I intended to convert into the child care space was designated as a garage-only space per the local building department.

At that point, I had a waitlist of parents waiting to enroll their children in my program, and I was determined not to let them down. I decided to rent my primary home and move to a new home. It was a hard decision; I had lived in my first home for 15 years, ever since I was married, and I loved that home. But, I found the perfect new space, a single dwelling located on the corner of a quiet neighborhood, with an existing 4 parking spaces and 2 car garage, and a circular driveway which will allow parents to come and go from one end to another. In addition, it had a complete separate floor measuring more than 1600 square feet to run my child care! After compiling all the documents needed, my attorney once again submitted my application to the Zoning Board on January 31, 2018.

My application was denied again. A group of neighbors organized in opposition to my application, without ever talking to me to learn more about my background and my business. They stated misinformation about the impact a group child care would have on the neighborhood, and ignored evidence I provided about my qualifications and my business. But because the zoning process is so subjective, their opposition was enough to override my request, despite the fact that families in my community desperately need more licensed child care options. I was devastated.

In total I spent more than \$21,000 in legal fees. I had to close the waitlist for my child care program, and I lost families who had sent their older children to my program because I did not have vacancies for their infants. I spent additional money on a surveyor, engineer, renovations, and applications fees, all in support of my dream to expand my business. Child care businesses are a community asset; it should not be this difficult.

Currently, Connecticut does not have enough licensed child care to meet the need. The state should promote opportunities for licensed child care providers like me to expand our businesses and support more children and families in our communities. Instead, I faced tremendous barriers to expanding my business. SB 291 would change that. This bill would ensure that cities and towns across Connecticut cannot impose unnecessary zoning restrictions on group child care. Similar protections are already in place for family child care--it makes sense to apply them to all licensed home-based child care settings.

I urge you to support SB 291 to ensure that family child care businesses can make high-quality, affordable early care and education accessible to all Connecticut families who need it. Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Emmanuella Lature

Emmanuella Lature
Child Care Center Director
10 Rolling Wood Drive
Stamford, CT 06905
(203) 312-4097